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SUBJECT: KOSOVO: SERBIA WEEKLY UPDATE (3/5 - 3/9)

11. (U) This cable summarizes notable events relating to Serbia and Kosovo.

12. (U) Summary: For the week of March 5, Serbia's preparation for the final, top-level round of UNOSEK talks, as well as the visits of A/S Fried and NATO SYG Scheffer were the most notable events related to Kosovo and Serbia. According to a national poll (sent to desk), Serbians are more divided on Kosovo than ever. Serbian leaders' hard-line rhetoric on Kosovo is an important factor behind Serbians' opinion that keeping Kosovo (60%) is more important than joining the EU (33%). End Summary.

UNOSEK: the view from Belgrade

13. (U) Both PM Kostunica and President Tadic will attend the final, top-level round of UNOSEK talks on March 10. PM Kostunica's office attacked the Ahtisaari proposal, revised after the last two weeks of consultations, as "worse than the previous one since it coincides with the position of the Albanian separatists."

14. (U) Radical Party leader Nikolic said that his party is capable of "carrying out a new October 5th" (citing Milosevic's ouster) if Kosovo is separated from Serbia.

Polls indicate hardening view on Kosovo

14. (SBU) Rhetoric from Serbian leaders, particularly PM Kostunica, that Serbia (and the UNSC) will not accept an independent Kosovo, appears to be contributing to hard-line public views on the issue. According to an Embassy-sponsored TNS Medium Gallup poll, 33% of Serbians think EU accession is more important than keeping Kosovo while 59% think the latter is the higher priority (up from 53% in December).

15. (SBU) Serbians' opinions are hardening on Kosovo issues with significantly fewer number of undecided respondents. The number of undecided respondents dropped from 14% to 8% in the question cited above. However, the percent of Serbians who would consider harsher reactions to Kosovo independence seemed to show a modest drop. In the recent poll, 58% would do nothing (up from 54% in December), 23% would protest peacefully (down from 27%) and 9% would support the use of force. Interestingly, respondents from Belgrade were the hardest line on these issues.

Diplomatic Activity

16. (SBU) While A/S Fried's visit and major policy speech in Belgrade did not focus on Kosovo, but on the future of Serbia in Euro-Atlantic institutions, he fielded several questions on Kosovo at his March 6 press conference in Nis. In response to a question about a possible veto in the UNSC, A/S Fried said it was too early to guess how members would vote, but that Kosovo will be resolved this year. A/S Fried added that it would be a mistake to assume that one country could prevent the adoption of a decision on Kosovo's future status. He called on Serbian leaders to act responsibly and bring concrete ideas on the table because the issues deal with real people in Kosovo.

17. (SBU) SYG Scheffer briefed NATO Ambassadors at the end of his March 8 visit to Belgrade. The SYG called the atmospherics "positive" -- more with Tadic than with Kostunica. On Kosovo, he said while the Alliance firmly supports the Ahtisaari plan. He hailed constructive steps put forward by CHOD Ponos -- specifically CHOD-COMKFOR communication. On the political side, SYG noted Serbia's participation in Brussels (weighing in on Kosovo) as a sign of Serbia taking advantage of PFP. While NATO "cannot afford to leave Serbia behind," it is up to Tadic to lead Serbians towards Euro-Atlantic integration, the SYG concluded.

17. (U) In interviews with a Belgrade daily on March 8, both the Ambassador and his British counterpart called for Serbia's constructive approach to UNOSCE talks. The Ambassador noted that the common goal should be to secure a safe and dignified life for the people in Kosovo, including Kosovo Serbs, not to score domestic political points. The British Ambassador added that Serbia should form a new government as soon as possible and that he sees the country

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as a partner and future EU member.

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